



SUPPORTING PERSONS WITH **DIS**ABILITIES

2

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be
the beauty and test of our civilization.”

— Gandhi

A Career and Technology Studies CCS 3070 Resource

 EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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2

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Supporting Persons with Disabilities 2

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Working with Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to provide you—a student who is interested in supporting persons with disabilities—with additional knowledge and information about the field of disabilities. At the beginning of each section you will be asked to reflect both on the important points within the section and on how they are relevant for you. We hope this resource will spark curiosity and stimulate further investigation and learning in those areas of greatest interest to you. Websites and resources are listed throughout and we encourage you to search out and explore additional resources on your own. Working with and supporting individuals with disabilities can be incredibly rewarding both personally and professionally. Personalize your own learning while using this resource by identifying your own examples, researching areas that are of interest to you and, most importantly, looking for opportunities to apply your learning.

Reflective questions

1. Why are you taking this course?
2. What questions have you have asked, or heard others ask, about supporting individuals with disabilities?

Why are you taking this course?

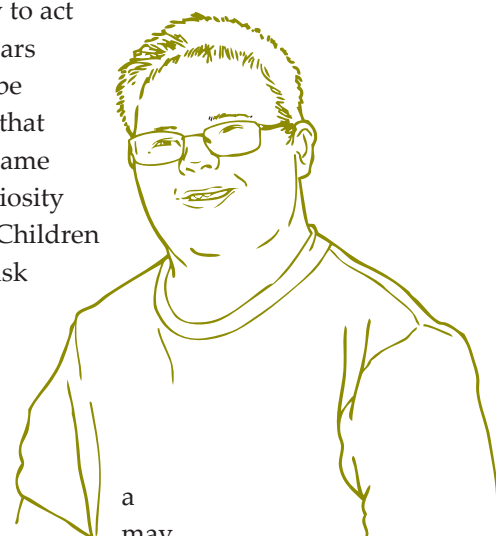
“We have a daughter with Down syndrome. She loves school. Being part of a Grade 1 classroom gives her the opportunity to interact with her peers in real situations of learning, play and conflict. Including children with special needs in all of life’s experiences is important for everyone.”

Some individuals have what would be considered disabilities, based on comparison with others in their peer group. Some disabilities, such as hearing loss, can be compensated for with assistive technology. As a person gets older, he or she is more likely to experience a disability. Some disability advocates

use the term “temporarily abled” to emphasize the point that any person could and probably will experience a disability at some point in his or her life.

Curiosity

Many of us are unsure how to act around someone who appears different from us. We may be uncomfortable in a culture that is strange to us. But at the same time, we have a natural curiosity about other people’s lives. Children in elementary school may ask why a person with cancer has lost his or her hair. They may demonstrate interest in a new student’s motorized wheelchair and enthusiastically take turn riding it. They wonder what it is like to be blind, or they may learn a few key signs so they can begin to communicate with a student who is deaf.



It's part of human nature to notice, be aware of and be curious about the differences between people. Appreciating these differences, and demonstrating respect and honouring all people, builds and strengthens our community. On the flip side, a person's differences can lead to experiences of exclusion and isolation. Who in your school is excluded from social situations or activities? Do any clubs—either formally or informally—discourage certain persons from participating in them?

"Working with students with disabilities always reminds me not to take things for granted. When I have students with different needs, it brings awareness to the need to differentiate and is a reminder to celebrate everyone's strengths. Especially when someone struggles, we emphasize their strengths."

— Wanda, Grade 4 teacher

There are multiple reasons why people work with, care for, become friends with, and live with individuals who have disabilities. Some individuals may have external reasons; for example, it could be a source of employment or may involve them in a volunteer activity that might lead to a job. Others may have more internal reasons, such as wanting to help others.

One of the more powerful reasons centres around personal relationships. As you get to know a person with a disability, you begin to appreciate and value the qualities and characteristics of that individual. It's not that the disability disappears or becomes irrelevant; rather, you realize that there's much more to your friend than his or her disability—that the person is not defined solely by the disability.



Facts and myths: What are you and others curious about?

When people are different, we become curious about:

- what life might be like for them
- what their differences might mean to us.

As we attempt to answer these kinds of questions, we have to sift through information that includes both facts and myths. Often myths stem from a lack of knowledge and from a “guessing” process. Some myths are perpetuated through prejudice, fear and/or an intention to do harm.

As a person working in this area, it is important to know the difference between facts and myths, and to know how to respond to others when they have questions or when they present myths as facts. The book, *Creating an Inclusive School*, 2nd Edition (Villa and Thousand, 1995), which poses the following questions about disabilities, notes that often there are no clear-cut answers to these questions.

Here are some of the most commonly asked questions about people with disabilities.

1. Can I catch a disability?

The best answer to this question is, “No, you cannot catch a disability.” Most disabilities are due either to a genetic predisposition toward a disability (that is, they are inherited) or to a trauma, such as being in a car accident. There are, however, some disabilities that can occur due to transmitted disease. For example, a person might develop hearing loss as a result of having had a high fever. Polio, a contagious disease, can also lead to certain disabilities, but most of us have been given a vaccine that prevents us from contracting this disease.

2. If a person can’t talk, does this mean they can’t learn other things?

Often, even though one area of a person’s brain or body has been impacted by a disability, other areas still function appropriately. For example, a person who has cerebral palsy, which impacts motor movements—perhaps (but not necessarily) including the ability to speak—may still have strong problem-solving abilities. Actor Michael J. Fox has Parkinson’s disease, which has a significant impact on his motor movements, but he continues to use his skills in other areas. He contributes to and has become an advocate for individuals with disabilities.

Using certain communication devices, individuals may be able to better control and/or enhance the motor movements they do have. This can



help them achieve significantly improved levels of independence, learning and interaction within their community. Nevertheless, many individuals who have difficulty talking or communicating with others may also be perceived to have difficulty learning in other areas. Communication is a critically important aspect of who we are as human beings and, as such, is a major factor in the measurement of what we call intelligence. We measure some aspects of intelligence; for example, determining what a person knows and how they solve problems, by asking questions and receiving verbal answers. When assessing a person's learning ability, it's important to consider what contribution the person's verbal skills make in comparison to other forms of learning such as visual learning, action-oriented learning, creativity and social/emotional intelligence.

3. Do all children with a particular disability tend to behave the same way?

Children with similar disabilities do not behave the same way—whether they have autism spectrum disorder or Down syndrome, are blind or in a wheelchair, or have some other diagnosis. All children have their own unique characteristics, interests, strengths and weaknesses. A diagnostic label simply suggests that they share a set of characteristics similar to others within that same diagnostic category. However, they can be different in many ways. Often children with disabilities have the same range of emotional and personality characteristics as others

without disabilities. They can be friendly or unfriendly, sociable or withdrawn, happy or depressed, agreeable or argumentative. Just as a parent knows that two siblings, raised in the same household in much the same conditions, can have very different personalities and abilities, so can two children with the same disability—even when they are siblings.

4. When should a person be told about his or her disability?

The decision about when to tell a child that he or she has a disability is up to the child's parents and should be based on how much, if any, help it will be for the child to have this information. Factors to consider in the decision-making process include the child's age and ability level, family composition (such as the presence of other siblings), access to supports, and how he or she interacts with and is perceived by peers.

Sometimes the decision to tell a child that he or she has a disability is made when the child is still very young. For example, if the child realizes he or she is not able to walk and must use a wheelchair, then if the parents have not already talked about this, they will need to be prepared for the child's "Why?" questions. When a child is born blind, most parents explain to the child early on that others can see with their eyes and that the child must learn to "see" using his or her other senses. When the disabilities are less visible, the decision about when to tell the child is often based on when the child becomes aware that, in some way, he or she is different

from other children. Discussing the disability in the context of a child's other characteristics and strengths can enable him or her to better understand why he or she is different from others in some ways, and why he or she may need different kinds of supports and accommodations than other children.

The decision about when to tell the child should take into consideration the possible negative impact of the knowledge on the child and others. Support groups for family members can be beneficial. Numerous books, websites and organizations are now available for children and family members that convey, in respectful and thoughtful ways, information about living with various disabilities.

5. What if the child does not want to be different?

Most people want to belong—want to be part of a group. They do not want to be seen as different, especially when the difference focuses on something that is considered a problem or disability. Being different may mean that they are excluded in some way, or are perceived as being “less than” the other children. This perception must be addressed with sensitivity, respect and honesty.

When working with a person with a disability, it is important to understand and encourage his or her hopes and dreams. As much as possible, situations should be set up to eliminate or minimize any feelings of not belonging or not being valued. The techniques used to include children with disabilities often benefit other children as well. For example, buddy reading could be set up, so

that even the child who can't read has the opportunity to participate. Or a picture schedule created for one child could be used with all the students.

Being sensitive to a person with disabilities demonstrates respect for who the person is. This entails seeing—and helping the individuals themselves to see—a person's positive qualities and characteristics. One effective technique is to ask all members of a group to write a list of “five wonderful qualities” for each person in the group. This is one way for group members to recognize, respect and appreciate the uniqueness of each individual.

It is important to ensure that the person with the disability recognizes his or her strengths as well as his or her unique needs and how those needs can be met. Sometimes the disability is apparent and this may be an opportunity, depending upon the wishes and the comfort level of the child and family, to build a sense of community by sharing, within the group, various aspects of the child's ability and disability.

Sometimes it is helpful for children with disabilities and their peers and/or classmates (and possibly parents and teachers) to be part of a presentation focusing on appreciating differences. Specific differences, such as wearing glasses or a hearing aid, can be recognized, with the emphasis on everyone being valued. Being honest about what a disability entails and how it may potentially impact provides the basis for acceptance, as well as information for others on how to support and contribute to that person's success.

6. How do we prevent teasing or bullying of people?

Individuals who are different—for any reason—are often exposed to teasing or bullying, and they experience those messages as hurtful. Sometimes, in the case of an individual with a disability, this occurs due to a lack of knowledge about the disability. In these situations, it would be effective to help all individuals, including those who have been doing the teasing, to gain a better understanding about the disability and about the strengths and abilities of the person being teased or bullied. Some people consider teasing as something done “in fun,” but it can be a form of bullying.

While attempts to teach others not to tease or bully are important, the attitudes, beliefs and feelings of the person with the disability also have an effect on the situation. Helping the person who is being bullied recognize the intent of the ridiculing behaviour can make it possible for him or her to advocate for himself or herself, either by helping the other individual understand that the teasing is unacceptable or by having comments or “scripts” ready with which he or she can rebut the teasing. Of utmost importance is what the person who is being teased believes about himself or herself—that he or she sees himself or herself as having positive qualities and characteristics.

7. What is the purpose of including individuals with severe disabilities in regular school programming or community activities?

Research has demonstrated that, when the necessary supports are in

place, it is beneficial—both for the student with disabilities and for other students—to include a student with disabilities within a grade-level classroom. Studies have demonstrated that students with disabilities who participated in grade-level classes scored higher in academics, interacted more frequently with peers, received more social support and developed longer lasting friendships as compared to students who were educated in segregated or specialized settings. The included students also demonstrated increased levels of happiness, self-esteem and school attendance. Having a student with disabilities in a class increased all students’ knowledge about the specific disability. Other students are more likely to recognize and appreciate the person for his or her strengths and interests rather than just defining the person by his or her disability. While this research was conducted with students, it also seems to be true, in subsequent work or community situations, that all parties benefit from interaction and shared participation in activities.

8. What can be done to ensure the safety—both physical and emotional—of individuals with disabilities, their classmates and the people working with them?

Ideally, all individuals—those with disabilities and the people learning and working with them, as well as those without disabilities—should feel safe at home, at school, at work and in the community. Steps can be taken to minimize or remove risks.

- The prospect of bullying is a very real concern. Monitoring and

reporting are critical, especially for individuals who are more vulnerable and may have weaker understanding or communication difficulties.

- Specific risk factors may apply for some individuals with disabilities. For example, a student may have a medical condition, or he or she may get easily lost and not be able to communicate. For these students, personal identification items such as bracelets may be useful.
- Sometimes an increased risk exists that an individual—whether it's a person with disabilities or a person without disabilities—may harm another person. In situations where harmful behaviour may occur, it is important to carefully monitor the person who may harm others. It is also important to have a plan in place to deal with the situation. Positive supports that can be generalized to employment and community settings include:
 - having a positive behaviour management plan in place for those individuals who are at risk of hurting others
 - teaching social skills and anger management
 - initiating strategies and techniques to involve and empower individuals, their family members and those in the community working with them
 - ensuring collaboration among all adults who work with the individual.

9. What help will I be?

You may be able to provide support on a number of levels.

- On a functional level, you may be able to help an individual do tasks he or she is unable to do, such as getting dressed, negotiating a wheelchair around obstacles or communicating with others.
- In a learning situation, you may be able to support a person using special devices or supports to complete a task, or playing a board game to develop math skills.
- On a social level, you may help them get to social functions, initiate interactions with others or perhaps join you in social situations, such as parties or activities like skiing or bowling.
- On an emotional level, you can develop a trusting relationship with them.
- On a community basis, you can be a role model for others, demonstrating the importance of valuing each person and appreciating who that person is.

10. What can one person do?

One person can do a lot! Although it's important to recognize that there is strength in numbers, here are just a few of the things you, as an individual, can do.

- Continue to model and demonstrate the qualities of sensitivity, respect and honesty.

- Talk to others about your positive experiences with people with disabilities.
- Help others become knowledgeable about individuals with disabilities.
- Correct myths when they come up in conversation.
- Contribute to or build relationships among individuals interested in disabilities and the people who are affected by them.
- Identify or create a successful example of a person with disabilities being included—share this success story.
- Get into positions of influence—participate in community consultations or non-profit associations or organizations for change.
- Become a volunteer.
- Be thoughtful, caring and compassionate with all of the people you encounter, no matter what prejudices, obstacles or adversities they face.

Most importantly, with reference to all the above or any other individual contributions you can make—***take action now!***

The Evolving Field of Disability Studies

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and test of our civilization.”

— Gandhi

Reflective questions

1. As you read through the scenarios from various periods of history, what values would you associate with each period?
2. If you were able to transport back in time, what message would you give to the parents of that time period?
3. What do you predict will be the next phase in this evolution?

Examining the evolution of communities in general, and the education system in

particular, reveals valuable information about societal attitudes, values and practices toward individuals with disabilities. History shows that individuals with disabilities have become progressively more included in schools and communities. More importantly, they have increasingly been seen as valued and contributing members of society. The result has been increased learning, acceptance and belonging. Time will tell what impact the current focus on inclusion will have on increasing the independence, learning and human dignity of persons with disabilities, and what additional adjustments will be required of both individuals and society.

A historical perspective

The way in which individuals with disabilities have been treated has evolved throughout history. By reading the following series of conversations between a child and a parent, you can develop your own perspective about the attitudes and values of each time period presented.

Before 1800: Unworthiness

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. But children like you don't need to go to school. School is for people who can learn things such as reading and writing. And you are not the only one who can't go to school. Bobby, who has a different colour of skin, and Sally, whose parents do not make much money, also don't go to school. It is just not worthwhile for any of you to go to school!

1800 to mid-1900s: Institutionalization

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. But children like you get to go to a special place to live. This place has been set up especially for people who are different. Some

Pre-1800

1800

1930

1940

places are for children who can't hear, others for children who can't move very well and even others for children who can't learn. Sometimes everyone is together in one big place. Special people who take care of all of your special needs also live there, and I am hoping that you, like some of the other children, will learn how to do some work while you are there. They have really neat things for you to do, such as sorting out material that can be made into things, taking it apart, re-sorting it, and then putting it back together again. By doing the same thing over and over again, you will learn how to do it well.

Son: Mama, will you come to see me?

Mother: Yes, son, we will. But remember, not all the people there will have someone to come and visit them. Babies and very young children may even live there. And we will come to visit you even when you are older and become an adult. We will love you forever.

1950 to 1960: Special education classes

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. And you *do* get to go to school. Not only that, but you will have your own special class to learn in. Kids who can't hear or talk, or who can't walk, still go to their own schools. But you get to go to a regular school.

1950

Son: Billy is in that class at school and he says that others call it the dumb class and they say that he is 'retarded.' He was crying when he told me that. What does 'retarded' mean?

Mother: Some kids are mean and say mean things. Some parents also say mean things even though they don't think what they are saying is mean. Last week we were at a meeting at the school to get the new special education class started. Many of the parents who attended said that rather than starting a new class at your school, we should send you to the school across town that already offers some special education classes. I want you to know that your principal said they would work hard to ensure the new special education class did not disrupt the learning of other students. He assured the parents that, as much as possible, the classes would be kept separate.

1960 to 1970s: Interdisciplinary developmental curriculum

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful just as you are. And you *do* get to go to school. Not only that but you will have your own special class to learn in. Kids who can't hear or talk, or who have physical problems, such as being unable to walk, still go to their own schools, but you get to go to a regular school.

1960

Son: What will I learn in my class?

Mother: My son, this is truly a special class for someone as special as you. A speech-language pathologist will come in and work with you on your speech, and someone called an occupational therapist will work with you on how to colour within the lines, write, put pegs into holes in a board and do some self-help things such as getting dressed and going to the bathroom on your own. A physiotherapist will help you to walk better. Sometimes all of these people will provide therapy to you in a single day because it works better if they travel together. There is even a person who will work with you on these things after the therapist leaves. The teacher, who has special education training, will be there to make sure all of this happens and that you continue to learn. Once or twice a year they may have a meeting where all of these people get together to discuss what they are going to do next so that you can have what they call functional living skills to help you be independent at home, at school and in the community.

1975 to 1980: Legalization

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. And you *do* get to go to school. Not only that, but you will have your own special class to learn in. All across Canada and the United States, even kids who can't hear or talk, or who have physical problems, such as not being able to walk, now get to go to school. It actually took the passage of a law in the United States to make this happen, because many school districts and parents did not think your education was important. They thought that having you in the school or in regular classes would take away from the learning of the other students. But this law says that you and your learning *are* important, and that going to school is your right!

1980s: Integration

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. And you *do* get to go to school. While you have your own special class to learn in, you will also get a chance to be integrated into other classes—such as gym, art and music—on a part-time basis.

Son: Billy is in that class at school and he says that others call it the special needs class and they say that he is 'handicapped.' He was crying when he told me that. What does 'handicapped' mean?

Mother: People who are handicapped have difficulty doing some things—just as you have difficulty learning certain things. It does not mean that their disability is who they are. We are working with Billy's parents and other parents to ensure that children are seen as children first, instead of being defined by their disabilities. That means we do not say that a person is autistic, or is mentally handicapped or has Down syndrome. Instead, we say that a person (notice that we talk about the person first) has one of these conditions—along with other characteristics that may be

1970

1980

1990

1990

quite wonderful. You are still our precious boy, and even though you have a 'handicap,' you are so much more than that to your father, your sister and me.

1990s: Mainstreaming

Son: Mama, why can't I go to school like everyone else?

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. And you *do* get to go to school. While you have your own special class to learn in, something called mainstreaming is occurring, which means that you will get to do some of your learning in regular classes. Therapists will continue to work with you, but they will now focus more on functional living skills and/or academic skills, depending on what your teacher and we decide would be best for you. The focus is now on integrated, multidisciplinary teams. 'Multidisciplinary' means that a number of skills are worked on at the same time. For example, during snack time the social behaviours of being polite and waiting your turn are integrated with the skill of communicating your desires and with the motor movements of grasping and then eating the snack.

The 21st century

2000: Inclusion

2000

Son: Mama, I am so excited about going to school, just like everyone else!

Mother: My son, you are wonderful. And we are so proud of you for going to school and learning there. What do you like about school?

Son: I like that I have so many friends and I get to go to every class with them. Sometimes the person helping the teacher, who is called an EA (which means an 'educational assistant') gives me some additional support. Sometimes she helps the other kids in the class, too. I am working on the same stuff as the other kids work on, but sometimes what I do is different from what they are doing. I see a speech pathologist, but she comes right into the classroom and provides my teacher and me with some things I can work on. I also get to do things with Peter, who is my learning buddy. I am so excited about sharing my portfolio so you can see how much I've done this year. My teacher says she is very proud of what I have accomplished.

Son: Mama, why is it that I get to go to all my classes and cousin Betty goes to a special class in her school?

Mother: There are special schools and special classes that benefit some students and their families. Some of the students in a school may go to the special education classes all the time, while other students only attend those special classes some of the time, and they take part in other classes the rest of the time. What is important is that no matter where a student is, whether a grade-level classroom or a specialized setting, they feel valued and successful.

2010

Factors Impacting Successful Inclusion

Reflective questions

1. What are some ways that people think, feel and behave that have a *positive impact* on the inclusion of people with disabilities?
2. Give an example of something you have heard a person say or seen a person do that has fostered an attitude of **inclusion**.
3. What are some ways that people think, feel and behave that have a *negative impact* on inclusion (that is, that promote exclusion)?
4. Give an example of something you have heard a person say or seen a person do that has fostered an attitude of **exclusion**.
5. What are some advantages of labelling students who have special needs? What are some disadvantages?
6. In what ways do relationships affect inclusion?

Attitudes and beliefs

“Hey, Dad, remember how we heard last week that we were going to get a new student at our school, David, and that he had autism? Well, I was so surprised today when David showed up in our class. It’s funny, I thought he would look different or act weird—like maybe spinning around or avoiding contact with people. Well, he walked into the class and he was wearing this cool t-shirt with a picture of my favourite band on it—and he even knows the names of all of the band members! He said ‘Hi’ to me and we talked about the band. I guess he needs to have schedules, and sometimes he didn’t understand what the

teacher says. But you know, I don’t like it either when I get interrupted or something new happens that I’m not prepared for. I don’t know yet whether David and I will be good friends, but he sure wasn’t what I expected. I guess we’ll just wait and see what happens.”

— Grade 5 student

Prejudice and stereotyping

We often use “groupings” to help us understand and communicate with others. For instance, we know that food is something you eat and that clothes are something you wear. We group things according to common characteristics. The idea of **prejudice** comes from the concept of “prejudging” a person—that is, making a judgment about something or someone without having sufficient knowledge. Prejudice, which generally has a negative connotation, is often the result of our lack of knowledge about individuals who are different from us. These can be individuals of a different religion or race, or people who have different abilities and disabilities. A **stereotype** is a belief about a whole group of people.

How stereotypes affect inclusion

A person may not support an inclusive classroom or an inclusive community situation based on his or her stereotyped belief about a group of people. This creates a prejudice and can impact inclusion in two ways.

The first way prejudices get in the way of inclusion is when a person may not be included in a school or community situation based on the differences others perceive. History reveals that

minority cultures (e.g., First Nations students) and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be placed in segregated classrooms more frequently than students from mainstream, middle class backgrounds. Because communication and learning are very important aspects of social interaction, students from a different cultural background may be at a disadvantage in school and other situations. However, if they are given the opportunity and support to participate and learn with others, they can often do very well.

Sometimes diagnostic labels for individuals with disabilities come with **inaccurate** or **incomplete** notions of what the person is like and is capable of. Some parents may experience fear or anxiety if they perceive their child to be at risk because of what they believe about the characteristics of the student with a disability.

When the parents of the Grade 5 students heard that a student who had autism spectrum disorder would be joining the class, they got together and signed a petition to block his inclusion in the class. Without knowing the student, some of the reasons they expressed were that, as a student with autism, he might:

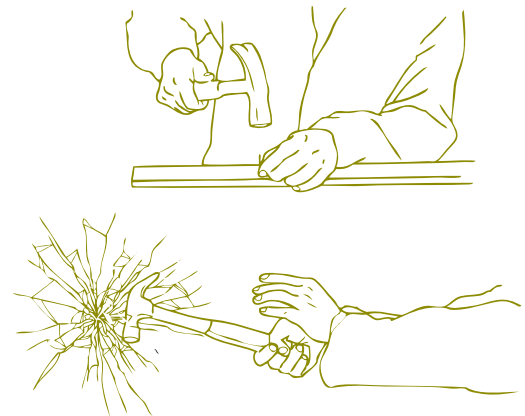
- *hit another student*
- *touch a student in an inappropriate manner*
- *disrupt the class with acting-out behaviour*
- *take teacher time away from other students.*

Prejudicial attitudes can create social barriers. For example, a student may end up playing by himself or herself during recess and may not be invited to join other activities.

Attitudes displayed by the teacher and the school can have a huge impact on the acceptance of the student within the class. If the teacher notices and affirms the student's strengths, is accepting and sets up situations that encourage cooperation, then the student will have a greater sense of belonging and other students are more likely to accept and appreciate the student.

Labelling

Labelling is a powerful tool. Like any tool, when used properly it can be helpful but when used inappropriately it can be detrimental and even do harm.



A hammer is an effective tool for pounding in nails. However, it can also be used for destructive purposes. Similarly, labelling can be helpful in the successful inclusion of a person with disabilities or it can be damaging and harmful.

When David was in Grade 4, his mother had a talk with him about some of the things David had begun noticing at school. He talked to his mother about being different from the other kids, and about how this was causing him a problem. His mother acknowledged his concerns and they discussed not only the problems that were occurring but also what was being done to counter the problems.

During their discussion, David's mother told David that there was a name that provided

a description of people with some of the differences David displayed. She then asked David if he would like to know this name. He thought about it for a moment then asked, “Do I need to know this name or can I make up one of my own?” David’s mother laughed and David came up with his own private name for the differences that he was displaying. After that, both he and his family used this name whenever David did something that was different. David and his mother also reviewed the strengths he displayed.

Two years later, David and his mother had a similar discussion. This time David chose to find out the official name for his differences. He and his mother read some books—written for children his age—about autism spectrum disorder. When he went into the next grade he had become somewhat of an expert on this topic, and would frequently remind people—when they asked or made a comment—that “I am first and foremost David, and I would like you to know what I can do well first, before I tell you more about autism and what that means to my life.”

Beneficial effect of labelling

- Labels have the potential to create a better **understanding** of an individual. Diagnostic categories—such as anxiety, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder—group individuals on the basis of a set of common characteristics. Within each of these diagnostic categories, there is a body of information and research available that can help people develop a better understanding of the disability and to identify best practices in educational and intervention techniques. Having this information may help caregivers and educators design more specific and appropriate strategies to facilitate development and success.
- Labels have the potential to facilitate **empathy** for the individual with the disability. For example, it may be easier to empathize with a student who doesn’t complete an assignment if it is known that because of his attention difficulties, he has difficulty remembering the directions. Getting upset about changes in routine is more understandable for a person who has autism spectrum disorder.
- Labels can also build **self-esteem** when a person understands that he or she has a specific disability and that is the reason he or she may experience certain difficulties or challenges.
- Labels have the potential to enhance **community appreciation** for differences between and uniqueness among people. Rather than seeing the negative connotations of a label, people can be encouraged to:
 - recognize that everyone is different and each person is unique
 - recognize that a person with a disability has strengths and can be successful
 - consider how society benefits when we appreciate that we are all different and unique in some way
 - recognize individuals for who they are, completely apart from any label that they may have.
- Labelling has the potential to allow for more effective **communication**. Individuals working with or caring for a person with a disability—including parents, educators, therapists and employers—can more effectively communicate the areas for support.
- Labelling has the potential to provide **relief and closure to parents**.

Understanding that their child has a specific disability offers them greater insight into their child's behaviour and may reduce or relieve feelings of guilt. Knowing information about disabilities may lead them to join a support group or form a support network.

"I work with a student who has some hearing and behavioural issues. Being part of the class is enabling him to learn social skills and coping strategies. Another benefit is that the staff and students are learning to be patient and appreciative of someone who has disabilities. The situation is forever changing and unpredictable, so together, as a team, we are growing and learning to have realistic expectations. It is challenging! But small steps can be very rewarding."

— K., Grade 5

Detrimental impact of labelling

- Diagnostic labels do not generally emphasize or appreciate a person's strengths but tend to focus on his or her weaknesses or problems.
- In and of themselves, labels tend to provide **no explanation of the causal factors** or of why the difficulties are occurring and they generally offer **no suggestions for intervention or remediation techniques**.
- Labels may lead to **self-fulfilling prophecies**. The person and/or others may look for and see the undesired characteristics and the person then lives up (or down) to the expectations of the disability label rather than achieving what he or she is capable of. For example, Peter's substitute teacher instructs him to "sit down and do his work." Peter replies, "I can't do that—I'm hyper, you know."
- Labels may **excuse the behaviour**. But, for example, if a child experiences

high anxiety when presenting to the class, this does not mean the student should avoid all presentations. It does mean that the teacher, along with the student, should try to discover an effective and comfortable way for the student to share his or her knowledge with other students.

Experiences and relationships



A circular dynamic exists between relationships and inclusion. The more a person interacts with and is included with others:

- the more stereotypes break down
- the more the individual is viewed for his or her positive qualities rather than for his or her disability
- the greater the understanding and acceptance of the individual
- the stronger and the more authentic the relationships are.

This is apparent in schools where inclusive classrooms promote authentic social relationships, including participating in activities such as birthday parties and sleepovers with friends. It's also evident in community settings, such as dance, sports

or scouting, as well as events such as community picnics. The effect is circular:

- the greater the inclusion, the more developed the relationships
- the more enhanced the relationships, the more expanded the opportunities for inclusion.

Universal design

Reflective questions

1. What do you think the term *universal design* means?
2. Identify three to five typical barriers in our society that prevent a person from being successfully included.
3. What design modifications would you make to your high school to facilitate successful inclusion of people with disabilities?
4. What types of assistive technologies have you seen used by individuals with disabilities?

Barriers and accessibility

A key aspect of working with a person with disabilities is to identify potential barriers to participation during school or job-related activities as well as during social and leisure activities. Accessibility refers to solutions that will reduce or eliminate those barriers.

Reducing barriers for people with disabilities may reduce barriers for other people as well. The importance of universal design for learning, also known as UDL, is that it removes barriers and ensures access for all individuals.

Within the field of education, universal design for learning is an educational approach that aims to increase access to learning for all students by reducing

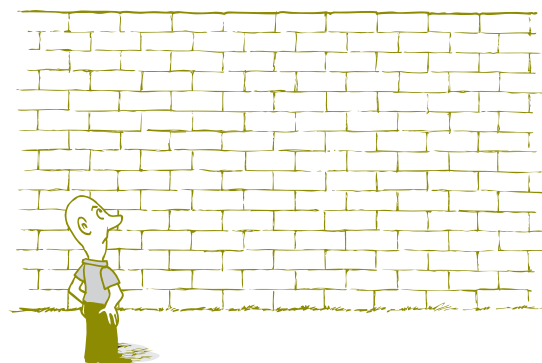
physical, cognitive, intellectual, organizational and other barriers.

In the preceding year, there had been a number of behavioural issues that interfered with Sally's class participation and academic success. Over the year, her teachers had identified a number of strategies that were successful for her.

Now, Sally was transferring into a new school division at the beginning of September. In June, the school from which she was transferring shared a number of environmental modifications that they'd found useful in supporting Sally.

By the time Sally began at her new school, several changes had been made to her classroom. Tennis balls had been placed on the legs of chairs to reduce noise. A "quiet area" had been set up in the back of the classroom. The teacher began the first day with a structured schedule that included both pictures and words. Using sound metre with a visual display, the class practised talking at different volumes: Level 1 (quiet), Level 2 (moderate) and Level 3 (loud).

When the principal inquired about how Sally was doing after the first month, the teacher replied that she was glad she'd found out about these strategies, because she had discovered that they were effective not only for Sally but for others in the class as well. Indeed, the teacher had decided she would use them in the future to ensure an optimum learning environment for all students.



In the past, barriers have been identified for students with disabilities after structures have been built and/or programs planned. When these barriers have been identified, efforts have been made to rectify the situation and remove the barriers. For example, if a student in a wheelchair arrives at a school that has no wheelchair-accessible washroom facilities, then major structural changes may be required to modify the washrooms. Similarly, a student who needs additional time to explore and practise new skills may have difficulty doing this within class time. Flexible scheduling that allows for small groups and one-to-one learning may be required for that student to be successful.

Universal design suggests that, whenever possible, plans are made ahead of time to ensure optimal access to structures, services and supports. Often, elements that were originally designed especially for an individual with disabilities have benefitted many other people. A classic example is the sidewalk curb cut. Although it was originally created to allow wheelchairs to move freely between roads and sidewalks, an unintended consequence was that others—such as parents with strollers, people with shopping carts and cyclists—found it easier to move between streets and sidewalks.

Physical barriers

Universal design has facilitated access, both for individuals with disabilities and for other persons, by reducing **physical barriers** in such ways as:

- providing sound amplification systems within a room
- providing wheelchair-accessible transportation, classroom facilities and accessible playground equipment

Learning barriers

For all students to be successful, **learning barriers** to curriculum (for example, learner outcomes, resources and assessment) must be eliminated or reduced.

Learning experiences should be meaningful for all students. For example, for a person with a significant learning difficulty, it might be more beneficial to teach reading and math within the practical context of learning to read in order to follow directions for a new game or to follow a personal interest.

Students need opportunities to learn in multiple ways and multiple contexts. Learning occurs best in a context that is interesting and motivating. When a student's interests, likes and preferences are taken into account, he or she will be more engaged and more motivated to learn. Students benefit from multiple ways of learning including:

- reading
- games
- role-plays or simulations
- using technology.



Universal design for learning recognizes that it is important to provide students with various ways of demonstrating their knowledge and learning. Authentic assessment happens when a learner has the opportunity to demonstrate skills in real-life situations. This allows for assessment of actual abilities, then identifies specific areas of strength and targets areas to be developed. For some individuals, this demonstration of knowledge would entail developing portfolios or creating a presentation.

Time barriers

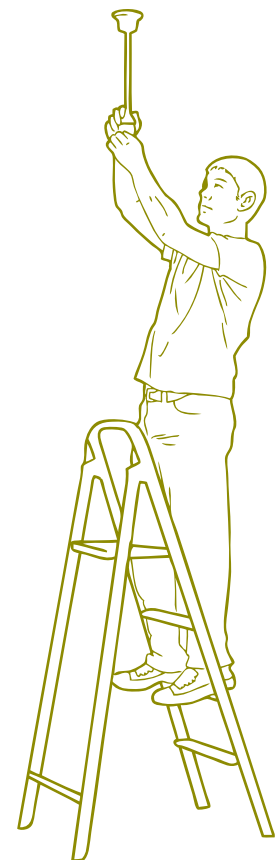
Strategies that reduce **time barriers** include:

- adjusting the length of a person's day or week—some people will be more successful if they are working a shorter day or week that more closely matches their energy levels
 - adjusting the schedule of activities during the day—some individuals learn the core subjects better in the morning while other individuals are more alert in the afternoon
 - using visual schedules—individuals can see which activities and/or classes are occurring, and when
 - taking extra time to transition from one class or activity to another, or to prepare for an activity (such as getting dressed for gym, recess or an outdoor work setting)
 - taking additional time to do work, write exams and complete assignments
- peer mentors or coaches
 - access to adult support personnel, including paraprofessionals and volunteers
 - flexible groupings that emphasize the individual needs of the students in the group; these can occur within paired learning experiences (for example, study buddies or learning partners) or in small-group learning experiences.
 - specific clubs or social groups that focus on socialization or activities for individuals who would otherwise not participate in extra-curricular activities or for whom a specialized focus (for example, social skills training or anger management) may be beneficial
 - individualized support within the classroom or during a specific activity, such as a field trip, provided by the teacher, a volunteer, peer or educational assistant.

Assistive technologies

Technology is a tool; it is not an end in itself. And, like any other tool, it can be effective if used for its intended purpose. Assistive technologies are used to help an individual be more successful. Technology use should be integrated into instructional, work and community situations.

Many years ago, I was working in an institutional setting with young adults who had significant disabilities. One of the residents was a young lady with cerebral palsy. Betty (not her real name) had very limited control over her body. The one area she had most control over was her head, and although she was unable to speak, she could use her head to indicate yes and no. She had grown up having almost all her needs and daily routines taken care of by others.



Access-to-support barriers

Universal design elements that reduce **access-to-support barriers** include:

That year, Betty received a motorized wheelchair. With a mechanical device attached to her head she was able to manipulate the controls to move the wheelchair in the direction in which she wanted to go. She quickly learned how to effectively control the wheelchair and was, for the first time in her life, able to move somewhat independently. Her sense of accomplishment was reflected in her bright smiles.

The story does not end there. During the year I worked with her, others creatively considered what else she might be able to do. With a new pointing device attached to a circlet on her head, Betty quickly learned to point at pictures to communicate her desires. An electronic keyboard with pictures was then developed—and Betty had speech! The expressiveness and knowledge that Betty had always had could now be communicated to others. Through a combination of creative educators and technological assistance, Betty's life became a beacon of light and hope, both for her and for many others who then benefited from her charm, wit and service to others.

Types of assistive technology tools

Technology, when used effectively, is consistent with universal design principles and has the potential to assist students with:

- representation—assistive technology provides various ways to access and learn new information and ideas
- engagement—assistive technology builds upon the student's strengths and interests to increase motivation and provide stimulating challenges
- expression—assistive technology offers opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and share information.

The following is a sampling of technological tools available in each of these areas.

- **Representation**

- Audio books may be useful for individuals to listen to while they are reading the same material.
- Text-to-speech software can translate written information into a read-aloud support.
- Video clips and images can enhance the learning of concepts.
- A sound field system—where the teacher wears a microphone and speakers are strategically placed within the classroom—can enhance attentiveness and ensure that all students can hear what is being said.
- Graphic organizers can assist students in organizing their ideas and demonstrating their knowledge.

- **Engagement**

- Wikis and blogs provide an option to work collaboratively which is motivating for many students.
- Hands-on activities and games can be engaging and motivating for some students.

- **Expression**

- Picture communication systems can provide an opportunity for students with limited verbal skills to express themselves and to communicate with others.
- Students can demonstrate what they know by using various project tools, such as creating a PowerPoint presentation, doing a mind map or participating in a role-play.

Additional examples of assistive technology in the classroom are presented in the chart on the following page.

Task	Low Technology	Mid Technology	High Technology
Taking notes	A peer, taking notes	Audio or visual recording of learning experiences	Speech-to-text software
Organizing information	Highlighting marker	Highlight tape	Computer software that highlights text and/or creates outlines
Writing	Pencil and eraser	Handheld electronic speller	Word prediction software

Here are some important questions to consider when using assistive technology.

- What will this technology do for the individual?
- What new skills and strategies will individuals need in order to use the technology?
- What training do I or other people in the individual's life need to ensure the technology is used effectively?
- Is the needed equipment and software readily available and accessible?
- Does everyone in the individual's life understand why and how technology is being used?
- How will technology affect what I do (that is, the way I plan, support, teach, assess and evaluate)?

To assess the value and usefulness of technological tools, consider the following:

- the level of independent use by the individual
- the unique capabilities and limits of the tool
- the tool's usefulness for task completion
- the tool's ease of use
- the accessibility of the equipment.

In addition to the questions and considerations noted above, consider the following.

- What impact does the technological tool have on the person's learning and professional life? For some individuals it may mean increased independence in learning, in doing work and in living productively.
- What impact does the technology have on other individuals within the school, home, work or community setting? Does it increase opportunities for positive interaction and socialization or does it impose an additional responsibility or task on the individual?

- What impact does the tool have on educators within the classroom setting or supervisors within the community setting? Does it facilitate the learning process?
- What impact does the technology have on family members? Can the person use the new tool at home? What training is required, and does the family have the resources (for example, a computer or the necessary physical space) to support it?
- The ultimate question is: “Does this technological tool increase the person’s quality of life?”

Inclusion

Reflective questions

1. Based on what you've learned so far, what would you tell a friend about inclusion?
2. What are some examples of inclusion within your school or community?
3. What are some specific examples of non-inclusion in your school or community?
4. What are the core values of inclusive schools and communities?

What is inclusion?

Inclusion is a belief system about belonging within the community. It is about valuing people and recognizing, appreciating and celebrating diversity. Inclusion occurs within all settings, including family, school and society. In classrooms and as reflected in society, children play together, learn together, experience adversity together and celebrate success together.

What does inclusion look like?

- Inclusion is believing that every person is unique and valuable. While we might belong to a variety of groups based on our gender, physical characteristics, culture, religion, family structure and learning ability, none of these factors, by itself, defines who we are. We are more than just a girl, a tall person, a member of the First Nations, a Christian, a single parent or a person with a learning disability. We all have multiple aspects to ourselves, and the totality of those aspects define who we are.
- Inclusion is believing that each person has strengths and interests that can be built upon, as well as areas in which he or she can improve.
- Inclusion is believing that each person can contribute, in his or her own way, to others and the community.
- Inclusion is believing that diversity is an opportunity that enriches us all. Including people with differences deepens our understanding of and involvement with all people in the school and community.
- Inclusion is more than just a philosophical belief. Effective inclusion requires both having a belief in the importance of unity in diversity and acting on that belief. It is also about modelling that belief through our actions, and using strategies and techniques that will ensure people embrace the concepts of belonging and of being welcome in the groups of their choice.
- True inclusion goes beyond the concept of a person just *being* included to the reality of a person *feeling* included—that is, a person participates and is treated in such a way that he or she actually feels valued and believes that he or she belongs.
- An inclusion philosophy embraces all aspects of a person's life including family, recreation and leisure, work and socialization. The hopes and dreams of all children, including children with disabilities, is taken seriously and supported by others.

What does inclusion NOT look like?

- Inclusion is NOT about believing that all people have to be treated exactly the same as one another. Being treated fairly should not be confused with being treated equally. To be fair to people is to ensure that they have equal opportunities to be successful—not that they be treated exactly the same as each other.

In order for people to be successful, a variety of different kinds of assistance may be required, such as:

- eye glasses
- hearing aids (or alternative forms of communication such as sign language)
- wheelchair-accessible environments
- braille (for people with vision loss)
- seats close to the fronts of buses (for seniors or individuals with mobility challenges).

In the above examples, it is not about being treated equally (that is, the same as one another), but about being treated fairly and having access to needed supports.

- Inclusion is NOT about physical inclusion only. For example, simply placing children with disabilities into a school or community setting without preparation or support is not inclusion.
- Inclusion is NOT about believing that a student is included when he or she is placed in a grade-level classroom, if:
 - the student is physically separate from the other students
 - the student does not interact with the other students during class time

or during recreational activities (for example, at recess)

- an educational assistant is the only person the student interacts with
- the student always does completely different activities and tasks than the other students are doing.

Inclusion within the educational system

“The overall well-being of a student with disabilities benefits greatly in an inclusive classroom. But just as importantly, the classmates who interact daily with students with disabilities benefit just as much! The overall culture has been greatly enhanced by each student with disabilities in our school community. Providing an inclusive environment is best for all, and that’s what we’re all about ... doing what is right for each student!”

— Ted, school principal

Consider this powerful quote from Elbert Hubbard: “A school should not be the preparation for life. A school should be life.”

Reflect on the following questions about inclusion.

- How does the purpose of school and of education relate to inclusion?
- What is the purpose of schools and education for students with disabilities? Is it different for students without disabilities?
- Is there different support for inclusion in early grades versus later grades? Why might inclusion be more possible in the early grades and more difficult in junior and senior high?
- How might attitudes be different towards different types of disabilities (e.g., blindness versus mental illness)?

Howard just celebrated his 10th birthday. He invited five friends from his Grade 4 class at school, two friends from his dance class and two from his Cub pack. He also invited his favourite cousin, and his older brother, Sam. Along with Howard's mother and father, three of his friends' parents came along for the fun and the cake.

Howard and his friends had a wonderful time. He went up and down the water slides with a huge smile on his face. He did not have as many turns as the rest of the children. His legs were shorter and he tired more easily. When Howard was not going up and down, some of his friends continued going up and down, while others sat with him and looked at a scrapbook his mother had created for him.

The book was called "Howard—The Big-hearted Kid." His mother told him she had called it that for three reasons. First, he was caring and kind.

Second, he really did have a big heart—he knew his actual heart was enlarged, and while he could be active, he was not quite as active as other kids. Howard's teachers, his dance instructor and the other adults who were involved with him knew about his enlarged heart, and adjusted their activities accordingly.

Third, as his mother had often said, "Howard, you have a great sense of humour." Indeed, the school principal had even begun allowing Howard to read jokes over the intercom once a week—which was exciting for Howard because he was just starting to learn to read, and one of the kids at his birthday party was his "reading buddy." (A few of the kids in the class had reading buddies and Howard was really proud to be one of them.) At the end of the day Howard joked, "Well, Mom, for someone who has Down's, I certainly was up and down a lot today!"

Mainstreaming and inclusion

Within the education system specifically, and in society generally, the mainstreaming movement of the 1970s through the 1990s has evolved into a greater emphasis on inclusion. Recognizing the similarities and differences between these two concepts facilitates a greater understanding of what inclusion is and what it is not.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming derives its name from the concept of individuals with disabilities being placed in mainstream education (that is, grade-level classrooms) and community settings.

- **Program development:** The student's program was often developed by a special education teacher. An educational assistant supervised by the special education teacher often provided one-to-one support and monitoring. Many students with disabilities spent most of the time in a special education class for core subjects such as math and language arts, and participated in grade-level complementary classes, such as physical education, art and music.
- **Sense of belonging:** Students who were mainstreamed often experienced a type of dual citizenship as they moved between two distinct groups of peers. Because the student spent the majority of his or her day in the special education class, he or she often did not form authentic relationships with students in the grade-level classroom.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion is that the student is a valued member of the school community. In this model, the local

school and the grade-level classroom should be considered as the first choice. Within these settings, individual students should receive the supports and services they need to be successful. This does not mean that every student who has special education needs spends his or her whole day in the grade-level classroom. For some students, it may be beneficial to spend all or part of the day in a specialized classroom or a small group setting or a specialized school.

Inclusion in post-secondary education

Most colleges and universities in Canada now make accommodations for students with disabilities. Structurally, physical settings have been developed for individuals with sensory (e.g., deafness or vision loss) or motor difficulties. Some post-secondary institutions have embraced universal design principles when building new structures. Others have hired consultants to address access issues either prior to the development of facilities or by retrofitting them as necessary. Learning accommodations are also made. For example, students may be provided with assistive technologies or additional instructional supports. Additional time for exams or alternative places for learning and testing are available.

Determinants of successful inclusion

- **Family support**
Family members support the philosophy of inclusion and are willing to take action. They participate in planning, strategy development and review of their child's programming.
- **Philosophy and attitude of school administration**
The school or community setting embraces inclusion. The administration recognizes and appreciates the benefits of inclusion

and is also aware of the supports required to ensure success. Administrative personnel use a collaborative approach that includes the involvement of family members.

- **Attitude, knowledge and skill**
Teachers and community service providers who feel supported by their administration, who believe in the concept of inclusion, and who are willing to learn more about the individual are the key to successful inclusion. Successful inclusion is dependent on the commitment and support of caring individuals in all environments.
- **Resources**
Resources are available for the individual, and for teachers or community service providers, to ensure that the individual has optimal opportunities for success. These include:
 - **time** to meet with the learning or community support team, plan activities and tasks, monitor progress, and ensure that both programming and a sense of belonging are present
 - **training** for the teacher or community support provider so that they may learn more about the individual being included, about best practices for persons with that type of disability and about how to successfully include the person by making changes to the environment, tasks and/or supports
 - **materials**, so that the individual being included, educators and/or community support providers have access to needed learning resources and technologies.

- **Access to support**

- **Consultants** provide meaningful assessments and practical suggestions and recommendations for the classroom teacher or community supervisor.
- **Learning coaches** can be a valuable resource for a teacher and educational team, and act as “thought partners” with whom to review programs, identify opportunities for learning, work through obstacles, choose which actions to take and celebrate successes.
- **Educational assistants** can provide valuable support to the classroom teacher. Ideally, the educational assistant works with all students in the class. In doing so, he or she would spend:
 - some time with the student with a disability
 - some time with other students so that the teacher can work with the student with a disability
 - a considerable amount of time under the direction of the teacher, facilitating the independence of the student with a disability.

Inclusion within the community

The progression of inclusion of individuals with disabilities within the community has resulted in significant benefits to all aspects of society, including the workplace, arts and entertainment, sports and leisure. There are countless examples of individuals with disabilities who have made contributions, in their own way, to their family and community.

Jennifer was a new graduate from her rural high school. Although she did not write diploma exams, she was delighted to walk across the stage with her friends to receive her high school certificate of completion. Not only was Jennifer excited about graduation, but she was also excited about her new job. She was to be the aide at a local early intervention program. She was delighted to be working with children and their parents.

Ten years later, Jennifer was still working at the same agency. Over the years her job description had changed as she learned and developed new skills. There was no doubt that she was one of the most valued employees. Not only did she do her job with enthusiasm, but she also had a powerful influence on the families that participated in the program. She often made a connection with the families, and many of them—particularly families that included children with disabilities—saw Jennifer and what she was doing as inspiring.

She was also great at remembering the children’s names over the years, and many of the other staff relied on her as the centre’s historian. Jennifer participated in almost all the staff functions, whether they were social, volunteering within the community or helping with specific projects.

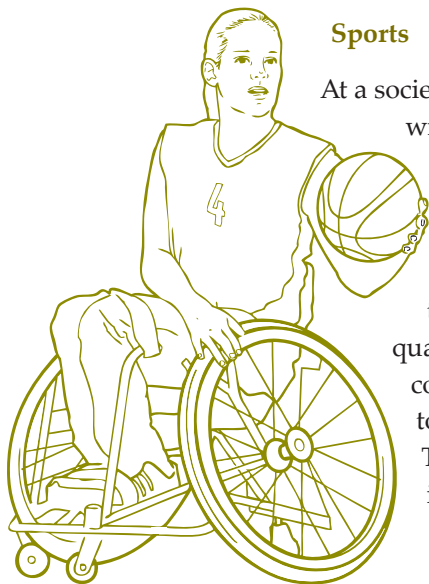
Jennifer also had her life outside of work. She loved to bowl and swim. After getting her job, she moved out of her parents’ home to a supportive community home situation. After a few years she decided to live on her own and, with additional support in some areas, she has been very successful.

Jennifer’s wonderful personality, her great work ethic and her ability to connect with others have been such that she has touched many people’s hearts and made a real and significant difference in their lives.

Individuals with disabilities need to have choices in how they pursue their interests in the different areas of their lives, including education, employment, sports, recreation and leisure activities.

Sports, art and recreational activities provide a way for individuals to build on their strengths and interests, and to facilitate communication that is universally understood. With a focus on success and on reaching one's potential, and an increased emphasis on inclusion, three general areas of choice are being developed for individuals with disabilities.

- Specific activities have been established with a focus on individuals with disabilities (for example, the Special Olympics or Famous People Players theatre group).
- Current activities are being modified to accommodate areas of disability (for example, lowering the basketball net for wheelchair basketball teams or providing a wheelchair row in a concert hall).
- New activities are being developed which incorporate abilities of all individuals (for example, sledge hockey accommodates both players with disabilities and players without).



Sports

At a societal level, sports for individuals with disabilities continue to gain recognition and support. Specialized events for individuals with disabilities have been established so they can experience such qualities as dignity, respect, courage and an opportunity to feel and embrace success. The Special Olympics, with its wide variety of events,

provides opportunities where individuals with intellectual disabilities celebrate and are celebrated for their accomplishments (www.specialolympics.org).

The International Paralympic Committee represents a number of disabilities and sports, with the objective of enabling athletes to achieve sporting excellence and to develop sport opportunities for all individuals with a disability, from the beginner to the elite level (www.paralympic.org). Various community venues offer specific programs—such as bowling, horseback riding and skiing—for individuals with disabilities.

In addition to the development of specific events fostering success in sports for individuals with disabilities, opportunities are being provided for them to be included with their peers in sporting events. A book by Ronald Davis, *Inclusion Through Sports*, provides specific examples of how to adapt sports such as volleyball for individuals with physical disabilities. Davis also introduces new sports, such as goal ball (adapted from a sport for individuals with vision loss), that can be played by all individuals, so that everyone, even those with disabilities, can participate and have fun together.

Art and entertainment

There has been a strong movement, both by organizations involved in the area of disabilities and by those within the arts and entertainment industry, to promote and advocate for inclusion of artists regardless of gender, age, culture, race or disability. Increasing numbers of films (for example, *Ray*, *Born on the Fourth of July* and *My Left Foot*) portray individuals with disabilities with greater accuracy and depth of understanding, as well as including individuals with disabilities in artistic endeavours. People



with disabilities are demonstrating award-winning skills. For example, Marlee Matlin, who has been deaf since age two, won the 1986 Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role in the movie *Children of a Lesser God*.

Alternative ways by which people with disabilities create art are also increasingly accepted in society. Joni Eareckson Tada, who was paralyzed in a diving accident in 1967, creates incredible paintings using her mouth to hold the paintbrush. Technological tools can help people with significant physical disabilities.

Recreation and leisure

Recreation and leisure activities are critical aspects of humanity. They create opportunities for having fun and can lead to new friendships and the development of new skills. Two factors are important in addressing inclusion for leisure and recreation activities. The first is knowing the person, and the second is knowing the community. People differ in their interests and desires. Some people are social and love spending time with people; others may prefer to have quieter time alone or to spend time with one or a few friends. Some people are active and would like to go dancing or play baseball. Others would just rather watch these on TV or play a game of cards.

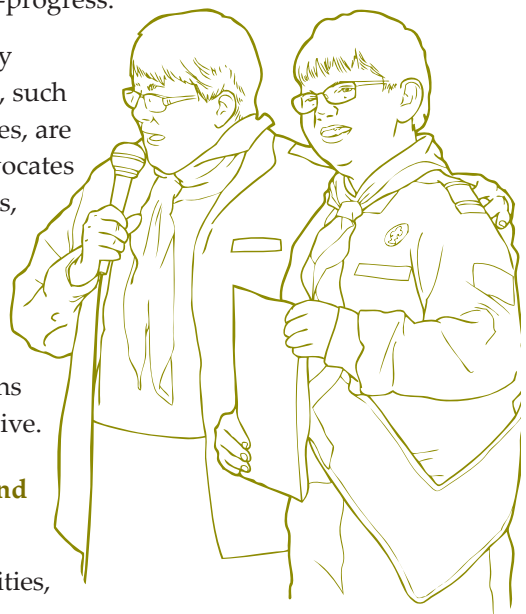
Our experiences often determine what we do with our recreational and leisure time. It is important that individuals with disabilities have the chance to explore various activities. Not all communities have the same opportunities; they may not have an indoor pool or tennis courts or they may not have the facilities or teams connected with a specific sport. Inclusion matches the interests and desires of the individual with the opportunities within the community. On occasion, that might mean the development of new opportunities within the community to match the desires of the community members.

Most recreation facilities are now being constructed using universal design principles, which include access for individuals with physical disabilities, such as wheelchair ramps and wheelchair-accessible washrooms. It is important, for example, to ensure that playground equipment can accommodate individuals with disabilities. However, such changes continue to be works-in-progress.

Increasingly, community organizations and clubs, such as Scouts and Girl Guides, are fostering inclusion. Advocates from these organizations, as well as from families and disability-related groups, continue to identify ways in which community organizations can become more inclusive.

Community agencies and organizations

Individuals with disabilities, family members and other interested individuals have the opportunity to participate in local, regional and international activities and venues to obtain support, gain information,



participate in learning opportunities, be involved in advocacy and socialize with others.

In many larger communities and cities, support groups focus on specific areas of disability such as autism, attention disorders and learning disabilities. Some groups—such as the Central Alberta Friends of Children With Special Needs—have a more general focus. Others—such as the Inclusion Parent Interest Group—have a specific focus on inclusion. Internet searches for specific support groups within a region will often provide contact information and meeting times. Some organizations, such as the Learning Disabilities Association, have not only local chapters but sometimes also provincial, national and international chapters.

On the educational front, the Alberta Chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children is part of a larger international organization, and promotes inclusion through activities including annual professional development opportunities and the “Yes I Can” awards for students.

One premier organization with a specific focus on inclusion is the Association for Community Living. The Canadian website (www.cacl.ca) reads, “Community living is a simple concept; most of us experience it every day. We live in integrated communities, we work with our peers, and our children go to school with their neighbourhood friends. This association believes that there are 10 important areas to address in order for a community to be inclusive.” Check out the ACL’s website for a description of each of these areas:

- Equality rights
- Close institutions
- Child rights
- Family supports

- Inclusive education
- Disability supports
- Safe and inclusive communities
- Eradication of poverty
- Employment equality
- Global inclusion.

Employment

All people need to feel a sense of accomplishment and to be recognized for a job well done. Work also provides us with the financial resources to be able to purchase the things we need and desire.

The Canadian Association for Community Living has a vision that “working-age adults with intellectual disabilities are employed at the same rate as the general population.”

Challenges for organizations striving for inclusion

While organizations and agencies strive for more inclusive programs, there are sometimes barriers that must be addressed. These include but are not limited to:

- attitudes
- resources
- knowledge and skill
- parental/individual choice.

Attitudes

Attitudes that do not support inclusion may result in a lack of support or even an active rejection of individuals with disabilities. Negative or non-supportive attitudes can be found anywhere from an organization’s members or employees through to the supervisory and/or administrative levels, including board members or trustees. Community or

family members may also demonstrate these attitudes.

Resources

The most frequent reason given for not providing a more inclusive environment is the perceived lack of resources. This could include not being able to allot the time, energy and money to provide for the planning, development and continuation of supports and services.

Knowledge and skill

Sometimes individuals and agencies truly do not know how to provide the accommodations and supports necessary for successful inclusion. Moreover, they do not know how to access such support from other sources, such as community groups, consultants or post-secondary institutions.

Parental/individual choice

Some parents and individuals with disabilities prefer specialized settings. They may perceive the supports and relationships in these settings to be safer and more desirable. This means non-specialized settings are less likely to develop their capacity for accommodating individuals with disabilities.

Community inclusion: Putting it all together

Ideal inclusion occurs when human services and community agencies that serve in education, employment, leisure, recreation, sports and other areas collaborate with each other and with families. This may require a willingness to go beyond the traditional mandates of the agency or organization to ensure the greatest choice and opportunity. It means that all organizations and agencies need to know what their counterparts are doing and need to build opportunities to share information, resources and

support services.

Alberta's Approach to Collaborative Practices emphasizes a positive approach to meeting the needs of individuals and families, particularly those who are at risk (see <http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/current-projects/collaborative-practices>). Its eleven foundational principles are summarized here.

1. **Collaboration** is a process for setting common priorities and incorporating differing perspectives.
2. **Shared leadership** is evident in schools (and agencies) where administrators model the value of collective wisdom.
3. **Team based** involves a group of people, including family members, who work collaboratively toward the success of the child or youth and his or her family.
4. **School–community (or agency–community) linked** means working collaboratively to promote and strengthen partnerships by eliminating barriers between the school (or agency) and the community.
5. **Persistent** means not giving up on, blaming or rejecting children, youth or their families.
6. **Family voice and choice** ensures child or youth and family perspectives are intentionally elicited, prioritized and actioned as part of a collaborative practice.
7. **Culturally responsive** practices respect and build upon the values, preferences, beliefs, cultural context, and identity of the child or youth, family and community.
8. **Natural supports** are individuals

drawn from family members' network of personal and community relationships.

9. **Individualized** means a customized set of strategies, supports and services are developed to support the goals identified for the child or youth and his or her family.
10. **Strength-based** practices build upon a child or youth's capabilities, knowledge, skills and assets, to help him or her develop the resiliency needed to overcome challenges.
11. **Data informed** goals and strategies are used to support the child or youth and his or her family.

A community that embraces inclusion provides information to families and individuals with disabilities about the opportunities that are available. If necessary, they assist in advocating for increased access to existing supports and services or for the development of new services. Ideally, community service agencies work with disability-based organizations with the ultimate goal of coordinating supports and services.

Programs that promote inclusion

William was worried about moving into his new home. His father had been transferred and William and his family were moving to a new city. His parents had talked to him about how the new home was specially designed for wheelchairs with wide doorways and halls. His new room would be painted whatever colour he wanted, and it had a big window that he would be able to see out of, even while sitting down.

William was most concerned about school and about meeting new friends, so before his family even moved to the new city he had a chance to visit his new school. His new

teacher talked about how William would be involved in all of the classes with the other Grade 6 students.

William was especially concerned about whether he would still be able to go swimming. He loved being in the water and had been part of the Special Olympics swim team. William's father met with a person from the local Association for Community Living and got a list of agencies that could be contacted and the services they provided. When he saw this, William was very excited to discover that a swimming pool had been set up for individuals with physical disabilities. There was no swim team, but they could look into the possibility of some individual coaching. Not only that, but they also talked about William being able to join the local Scouts group.

On the day before the move, William and his family were invited over to his best friend Dave's home, and the boys worked out how to use Skype to stay in contact with each other. When they were leaving, William talked about how sad he was to be leaving, but how excited he was about the new adventures that were about to begin.

Within any community, a variety of programs, services and supports are available to community members. There is an increasing focus on ensuring that these are accessible for individuals with differing skills, abilities and interests, and that the programs, services and supports are truly inclusive in philosophy and practice. In many larger communities, organizations exist that promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. For example, the Association for Community Living provides information about available opportunities and services, some of which are specifically for individuals with

disabilities, while others are for the general population, based on interests.

Inclusion checklist

A guide to inclusion for individuals with disabilities

It is important to consider the degree to which agencies and organizations provide inclusive services for individuals with

disabilities. The following checklist offers suggestions about what to look for when an individual with a disability and/or their family is considering the services of a particular service agency. This checklist can be used to make assessments across a wide range of options, including organizations, employment opportunities, recreational facilities and sports programs (the term “agency” as used in the checklist

Organization

Has the agency specifically identified a staff member to address aspects of diversity related to disabilities and culture?

Yes **No**

☐ ☐

Does the agency have a written policy regarding inclusion and diversity?

☐ ☐

Does the agency collaborate with other agencies and organizations in the delivery of services for individuals with disabilities?

☐ ☐

Are families actively involved in decision-making processes around the provision of services?

☐ ☐

Are mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies, procedures and practices that are in place for individuals with disabilities?

☐ ☐

Staffing

Do individuals with disabilities and their families have input into the areas of staff training?

☐ ☐

Have staff been given training in diversity?

☐ ☐

Philosophy

Are policies and procedures in place that promote respect and dignity for all individuals?

☐ ☐

Have practices been established that ensure the dignity of people who may have differing physical needs?

☐ ☐

Is a clear expectation in place that staff will display an attitude of inclusion toward individuals with disabilities?

☐ ☐

Do attitudes focus on a person's strengths and what they are able to contribute (rather than focusing on the person's disabilities or on a label)?

☐ ☐

Practices

	Yes	No
Are the specialized requirements and accommodations of individuals with disabilities integrated into day-to-day activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employers, staff, teachers, caregivers and peers promote independence by allowing the individual with disabilities to make mistakes and take risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employers, staff, teachers, caregivers and peers allow everyone to have equal opportunities for choice and decision making?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have activities and tasks been established that allow for a balance of challenging and successful accomplishments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are activities available that are based on the choices and interests of the person with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Facilities

Are the facilities accessible to individuals with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the facilities structured to make provision for individuals with sensory disabilities (for example, for persons who have visual or hearing impairments, or for individuals who have sensitivities in sensory areas, such as to bright lights, noise or odours)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If assistive technology is used, and others are required to use it, are a sufficient number of people available who know how to use the equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If or when required, are alternative methods of communication and/or correspondence provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Providing Supports to Persons with Disabilities

Reflective questions

1. How do you think parents react when they receive a diagnosis of a specific disability or medical condition for their child? How do you think you would react in similar circumstances?
2. What are some things you could do to make parents more comfortable about your interactions with their child?
3. What are some things you could do to show dignity and respect to an individual with a disability?

Personal satisfaction

In a society often governed by the attitude that “it’s all about me,” there is something special about having the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. For some, this might involve assisting a person with a disability in the development of a physical or academic skill or the willingness to try another way. For others, it might be the opportunity to promote increased social interaction.

Imagine how you would feel if you had been working with a person and observed one of the following reactions:

- eye contact and a warm smile from someone who typically provides these only to the closest members of his family
- the excitement that follows the first time a child kicks the soccer ball into the net ... or even just kicks the soccer ball
- a phone call from a mother who contacts you five years after you worked with her son, to tell you that

after all the “standing games” you played with him, he is now walking

- seeing a student demonstrate to the principal that she can now read the words, “I like my friends”
- being present when a child finally calls his mother “Mom” and seeing tears well up in the mother’s eyes as she gives her child a big hug
- hearing a student saying something such as, “Hooray, I did it! I finally —
 - ... put my shoes on by myself ...
 - ... wrote a story ...
 - ... got my learners license ...
 - ... caught a fish ...
 - ... asked a girl out ...
 - ... got my first paycheque ...
 —after you had helped them achieve success in something that was important to them.

Personal satisfaction not only comes from your interaction with the individual with disabilities, but also from the impact such interaction has on that individual’s parents, family and community.

“You can help people experience the joy and fulfillment of being valued and respected members of their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces. And you can make it possible to pursue dreams and lead lives full of endless opportunities. In short, you’ll have the potential to help individuals with disabilities enjoy their highest level of independence, while enriching your community with their strength and personal spirits.”

— Community Disabilities Services

Personal satisfaction and parent and family impact

Sam was a 21-year-old man who loved sports, particularly hockey. He could not read very well, but every day he scanned the sports pages of the newspaper and could tell others how well any of the teams were doing. He enthusiastically shared information about his favourite team. Thomas was hired to work for the summer in Sam's community home. His job mainly consisted of teaching skills, such as cooking—something Thomas loved to do. Over the summer, Sam learned to enjoy cooking almost as much as Thomas.

Thomas also liked to hike, and on one occasion he offered to take Sam with him. For safety reasons he needed to get permission from Sam's parents. Sam's mother and father were overjoyed! They had also enjoyed hiking, and had taken Sam hiking when he was a child. The first hike went well, and after that Thomas took Sam on three more hikes that summer. Thomas also introduced Sam to the local hiking club.

Sam's parents invited Thomas for dinner at their home on a number of occasions. They all got to know each other very well and enjoyed each other's company. Five years later, Thomas received a letter from Sam's mother letting him know that Sam's father had died. During the tribute at the funeral, Thomas was surprised to hear how much he had meant to Sam's father, and how much Sam's dad had appreciated what a good friend Thomas had been to Sam.

The parents and families of children with disabilities represent a variety of backgrounds and family structures. For them, it can be very powerful to have someone they trust share a relationship with their child (no matter what the age of the child). Sometimes it provides them with respite so they can do other things, such as spending time with other children or with their spouse, or even taking some

time for just themselves. Sometimes it provides an extension of learning opportunities. Always though, it provides an opportunity for another person to connect with their child on a personal and emotional level. Families appreciate when a person sees their child as a person first, and recognizes the positive qualities and characteristics of their child.

It is also important to realize that parents are at different levels of acceptance and may have different reactions to offers of help. Some are going through the emotional roller coaster of just having heard about their child's diagnosis or a change in the status of their child's health. They may be dealing with the impact of the child on the family—an impact that may include marital discord. Others may have had unpleasant experiences with even well-meaning caregivers.

Having a child with a disability adds a whole set of complexities to family life, with costs in time, finances and emotions. It is important to be aware of these factors, and develop the ability to handle disagreements in a non-personal way.

Parents and family members often appreciate being included by:

- being asked for advice and input on what to do, as well as on what the child's interests might be
- hearing how their child is progressing not only in targeted areas but in all aspects of the child's being
- receiving positive communication about special things that have occurred
- receiving honest communication about challenges
- hearing about how successes were celebrated and being involved in those celebrations.

Effective family communication

Effective communication with family entails:

- actively listening to really hear and understand what each person is saying
- finding common goals and coming up with ideas to address and help meet those goals
- summarizing the conversations
- following up to monitor progress.

Functional skills and age-appropriate activities

John's work placement during high school initially consisted of having him crush boxes and take them to the recycling bin. It was a job that needed to be done and John did it happily. He beamed with joy when he was promoted and given the responsibility of restocking the shelves in one of the aisles. John was given progressively more responsibilities. He was very proud of having his own bank account and quickly learned the value of money and of saving for special items.

Dignity and respect for people is illustrated both in the way we treat and interact with them, and in the activities and tasks that they do or we do with them.

Our interactions

Our interactions with individuals convey the respect we have for them. Even more than what we say, it is the small things we do that convey respect for an individual.

We can illustrate dignity and respect by:

- being courteous—saying “Please” and “Thank you”
- listening to the person and to his or her family members
- treating others the way that they want

to be treated, taking into consideration whether you would want to be treated this way

- being open to learning from the person
- seeking to understand what the person's difference or disability is like for him or her
- asking the person whether he or she requires help and assistance (rather than automatically assuming that he or she will)
- realizing that we all make mistakes, and then being prepared to accept suggestions and constructive criticism
- modelling respect around others with your language and your actions—even when a person with a disability is not present
- speaking up to clarify misconceptions and counter stereotypes
- being aware of how your words and actions impact others.

The activities and opportunities we create

Age-appropriate activities

We show respect for individuals when the activities we design and use with them match not only their developmental level but also are appropriate for their chronological age. Games and activities for a person who is developmentally at a preschool level should be modified to be more acceptable at the person's chronological age.

Here are some questions to be asked in the development of these activities.

- What skill is being developed?
- Is this skill really important for the individual—that is, is it functional and meaningful?

- Is the skill fun for the individual with a disability?
- How can the activity be modified so that other individuals of the same age would see as it being appropriate, relevant and/or fun?
- Will the activity enhance the status and promote the self-esteem of the person with disabilities?

Functional skills

The foundation of skill development for all individuals is the usefulness of the knowledge or the skill being learned. The focus should be on the clear reason for the skill being taught. Will it promote independence, help the person get a job, improve interactions and relationships with others? The emphasis is on the individual's present and future environments, with a preference for skills that will allow the person to participate as fully as possible in his or her educational and community settings.

Meaningful work

Historically, individuals with disabilities learned and worked in shop environments, putting together and then taking apart objects that were created. Such activity was intended to teach them to follow instructions, complete tasks with timelines, and accomplish various fine motor movements. The work itself typically lacked meaning and was not productive.

Engagement in meaningful endeavours, however, promotes people's sense of well-being and fosters a belief that they are contributing members of society. It enhances the feeling of accomplishment. Meaningful pursuits include the arts, leisure pastimes and entertainment (including both watching and playing sports). Art provides great meaning when it is created, discussed, displayed and in some way appreciated. Sports and leisure activities are significant when the person has fun and/or feels a sense of accomplishment about what he or she has done.

Basic Competencies

Building your skills

Having a job means developing the skills for that job. These include basic skills such as presenting a professional appearance, managing your time and being friendly. The individuals you work with will appreciate it if you dress up for them, and the staff will appreciate that you are presenting yourself as a professional.

Beyond the basic skills of dressing appropriately for the job, you will need management skills. At the same time, you want to be real, to be who you are. By being true to yourself, you are most accessible to the students who will recognize that you are comfortable with yourself and with them. This way they will see you as a person of authority, but also an individual.

You can share stories about your life, perhaps by telling the story of how you bought a particular jacket, and what the sales clerk was like or the decisions you had to make when you chose this particular jacket. Or you could tell the story of how you received a watch for a birthday gift, and a little about the person who gave you the gift, and how special the watch is to you. Little anecdotes about yourself help to make others comfortable around you and make you seem more like someone they can talk to and approach.

Management skills

Communication skills

Human beings are social animals and we communicate in many ways. There is always more that we can learn about how to communicate with each other.

One exercise you should regularly do is to spend a little time thinking about what you communicate. Even when we try to communicate as plainly and simply as possible, there is room for error and misinterpretation. That's why it's important to keep a sense of humour — what you think someone is telling you may not be his or her message. It takes a lot of effort to understand and to be understood. Having a sense of humour means that you won't become impatient with the process, and that you will allow for misunderstandings. Much of our communication is delivered by body language or language itself, by the situation, the tone, the intent and the emotional delivery and receipt of the message. There is a lot of information that our amazing brains sift through to determine what a person is saying to us.

We all have ideas about what is right and what is wrong. Sometimes these ideas are very black and white, while the world is in technicolour! When we communicate, we do so from our own block of colour — black, white, or some other colour. We hope that the receiver is able to get our message, but we may be sending more than we think. We may be sending signals of disapproval or doubt when we don't even realize it. Try this exercise.

So communication is one person sending a message and another person receiving that message. However, communication is two-way, not one-way. There needs to be some message sent back from the receiver to let the sender know that the message was received. This response can be physical action or words or both.

Basic communication

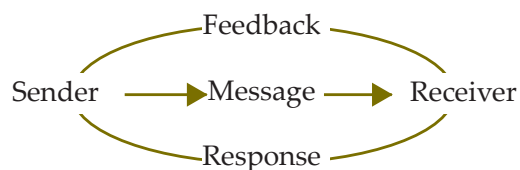


The sender needs to be able to

- compose the message
- send the message.

The receiver needs to be able to

- listen
- set aside ideas about the speaker
- set aside ideas about what she thinks the message will be about, even before she receives it
- read the non-verbal cue; e.g., the speaker's body language
- receive the message
- respond to the message.



We've mentioned the importance of having a sense of humour and how this does not necessarily equate with telling jokes. Having a sense of humour is the ability to communicate with the students

in an easygoing way, without stress and anxiety. Having fun and laughing with the students is important. Let's look at some of the ways our communication is delivered so that you can practise developing a sense of humour and flexibility in your communication skills.

Body language

Some researchers say that your body signals 55 percent of your message. Your physical presence creates a picture in the receiver's mind. You will have to overcome this picture by being aware of what you project by the way you use your body language. Here are some questions you could answer to learn more about your body language and how it might affect your message.

- What does your clothing say about you?
- Are you slumped in the chair or sitting up straight, standing straight or slumped on one hip?
- Do you have eye contact with the receiver?
- What facial expressions are you using?
 - smiles
 - frowns
 - squinting
 - eyes glaring or extra-wide open

Your voice

Some researchers note that your tone of voice represents 37 percent of what you say. There are aspects of your tone of voice that can affect your message. Ask yourself these questions to become more aware of your voice.

- Is my voice high-pitched or low-pitched? A lower pitch often signals more authority.
- Is my voice loud or soft? A soft, quiet voice can seem uncertain or shy while a loud voice can seem aggressive.

- Is there a musical quality to my voice? Do I put emphasis on certain words in my sentences? If you do, you create more interest for your listener.
- Do I speak quickly or slowly? Either end of this spectrum causes your listener to lose interest or fail to listen to you at all. A quick pace can signal disrespect for the listener. People need time to hear what you are saying. A slow pace can signal that you don't know what you want to say. Sometimes that's okay, as long as you have a sympathetic listener.

Your vocabulary

Some researchers say that the words you use represent only 8 percent of your message. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to determine the effectiveness of your word choice.

- Do I ask specific questions?
- Do I use positive language?
- Do I use examples to explain what I mean?

Your vocabulary can be specific or it can be fuzzy; the more specific the better. For example, describing a behaviour as "Stephan is always late for gym class" may seem like a specific and accurate statement. Consider how much more specific you can be when you gather data and chart it: "Stephan has missed the first fifteen minutes of eight out of ten gym classes," or "Stephan has been on time for gym class two times out of the last ten classes."

Be courteous and show respect

Courtesy and respect are important communication skills. Listening skills form an essential component of courtesy and respect. When you listen to others without interrupting, you respect their messages and the time it takes them to tell you. This

means that you are confident in yourself because you don't have to assert who you are and what you think. You are confident enough to listen to others and respect them for communicating with you.

Good manners are important for everyone. If you demonstrate how to say please and thank you, and how to listen and respond to others, you model this behaviour for others. Having eye contact is also an important component of communicating. Without glaring at the other person, but having a kind expression in your eyes as you look at them when they speak tells them with your body language that you are attentive and that you care about them. All of these communication skills make others, or anyone you speak with, feel important.

Whenever you encourage the students to speak with you about their ideas and experiences, you show respect. It's important to hold back your criticism. Give feedback, but don't put them down. You can provide constructive feedback if it is necessary, remembering to separate out the behaviour from the student when you provide feedback. Also try to use specific feedback. Rather than saying "That's a great idea," you could say "That's a great idea because it shows that you've thought about the history and the geography, or the music and culture [substitute appropriate words] in your story."

Be friendly

Open communication, a friendly smile and respect will go a long way to making others feel comfortable around you. See people as individuals. See the behaviour as something separate from the individual.

Make frequent deposits

Think of relationships as bank accounts. When you give positive feedback, you add to the bank account. Look for positive behaviours so you can deposit to

individuals' bank accounts. They will use this feedback, this strong bank account, to draw on for strength when times get challenging. Remember, some researchers suggest that the ratio of positive to negative feedback should be four to one. In other words, to support a behaviour, there should be four instances when positive reinforcement is offered to every single instance of a negative reinforcement.

Share your concerns with your colleagues and supervisor

It's important to balance your own life. If you take on too much or become too emotionally involved with the individuals you work with, you will struggle. The best way to deal with this stress is to share your concerns with your supervisor. You will continue to learn and grow through your work. Keep perspective by talking things over with colleagues and your supervisor.

Don't expect instant results or perfection

Having a clear perspective involves keeping things real—including your expectations. Don't expect fast results or that your work will result in perfection. Human beings make mistakes and this is how we learn. Learning new behaviours will take time. Your job is to support the positive behaviour and help the students find ways to make up for their mistakes and in this way learn and grow.

Be positive

Being positive is really the focus of this resource. Not only is your positive attitude important, but you also need to create opportunities for the students to receive positive attention and to create positive relationships. Skills you might develop to help you do this include:

- noticing positive behaviour and accomplishments, and rewarding these with positive reinforcement such as praise or attention
- frequently providing positive feedback
- letting go of the past so as to avoid criticizing it
- being very specific with feedback, and if the feedback has to be about inappropriate behaviour, providing positive feedback about it by describing the desired behaviour
- having a positive attitude, being flexible and optimistic about the challenges every day.

Information management skills

Organizing important information

Using the ABC Behaviour Pathways Model involves collecting data. It's helpful to record the data about an event as soon as possible after the event. That way you can build a base for managing future events, grow your understanding and develop your information-management skills. Make a plan to gather information throughout the day and set aside time at the end of each day to sort your information into a binder or computer. Make another plan to analyze all of your data on a weekly basis. This way, the information will be fresh in your mind, and you will be more likely to act on it on a daily basis, in a positive and meaningful way.

Graphic organizers

Charts are excellent tools for storing data. You may want to use brightly coloured paper for different types of graphic organizers. Not only will they be easier to find, but they will be more fun to use. The main thing about all of the information-gathering tools is that they have to be used to be useful. It's one thing to have created a bright and colourful binder, or to put the neon charts on a clipboard, but if you don't use them, they will only gather dust.

Use a graphic organizer to help you keep track of communication between you and the other staff. If you keep the communication book in a place where you and the staff can access it, you are free to get on with your work with particular individuals, and yet important information will be recorded.

Using technology

You might be surprised at the number of uses of technology that you take for granted. Making full use of the technological resources available to you can make your job easier. In turn, you can work with others to ensure that they are fully engaged with the technology available to them so that they leave school prepared to work with technology in society at large and in the workplace.

Use technology appropriately

When you use technology for communication purposes, remember to follow some basic rules:

- use a spell-checker, particularly prior to sending an e-mail
- use appropriate tone
- make sure that you use the best technology. Sometimes an e-mail is inappropriate and a phone call would be better
- don't respond in anger or frustration; wait until you are calm before expressing yourself
- don't surf the Internet, access Facebook or respond to e-mails for personal purposes while at work.

In addition, find out what the organization's policies are regarding technology, from ear buds to wireless Internet access, so that you can follow the rules and ensure that the individuals you are responsible for do so too.

Gather and send information

Perhaps you're the kind of person who eschews binders and clipboards, and prefers to gather and store data on an electronic device of some kind. Notebooks and iPads are excellent tools for the purpose, and are portable, accessible and searchable.

Text messaging, e-mails and brief notes can be quickly made and imported to your graphic organizers or other data forms at the end of the day.

An audio recorder is another tool that works well. It can fit in a pocket or purse and you can use it to make notes to yourself for review at the end of the day. Whenever an event occurs, you can record your observations, thoughts and anything else that seems relevant to the event. The recordings will help you to flesh out your report when you chart the ABCs of a behavioural situation.

Fill out forms

Most organizations will have forms on the computer. If you come across forms that aren't yet available electronically, offer to create a template. Not only do electronic forms speed up the process of filling them in, but the forms can be held in a database, searched and accessed more easily. Examples of templates you could use include:

- memos
- meeting notes and agendas
- contact information
- newsletters
- graphic organizers
- ABC pathways forms.

Confidentiality is important, so completed forms with personal information should be stored appropriately, with an encrypted password. It is also good practice to take

personal information off of electronic devices as soon as possible and store it on the organization's server.

Save and back up

Remember to save your document while you are working on it and to save different versions, if you make changes. You might want to go back and look at an older version, so it's wise to always make new copies as you prepare your work. Also back up information on a memory stick or external drive so that if the computer crashes, you still have access to the information. Consider carrying a memory stick with you at all times, on a keychain around your neck, or in your pocket or purse, so that you can access the information you personally created no matter which classroom or part of the school you are in.

Collaborate

As an educational assistant or behaviour coach, you have a very special role to play. Much of that role involves collaborating with others to support an individual's learning. With each unique partnership there are distinct skills you will develop.

Since you will have one-on-one time with the individual you are working with, you will be able to bring important information to meetings. You will know

more about the individual's family life, work life, and special interests, strengths and weaknesses. You will begin to understand triggers for the student's behaviour. Your role is one of the keys to helping the individual become aware of his or her behavioural triggers and grow in his or her skills in managing himself or herself in positive ways.

Collaboration is a process. It involves open communication on a regular basis. You need to be available, visible and willing to share ideas. You also need to be receptive to instruction and willing to listen to others.

Personal skills

Demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours

It's important to look after yourself. Stress can be defined as a person's way of responding to situations. In other words, you can choose to be stressed by your work, or you can choose to accept situations and respond to them calmly. One way to be calm and not succumb to stress is to be positive. The following are positive ways you can look after yourself and at the same time provide a model for others.

- Take the opportunity to sing every day, whether in the shower, in the car or for your friends. Expressing yourself joyfully is de-stressing.
- Take social time to be with your friends.
- Eat healthy foods throughout the day. Get enough sleep and exercise. Try to spend at least one hour a day outside, in the natural sun, breathing the fresh air. These things will help you be active and alert, joyful and optimistic.



- Consider getting a flu shot each year. Have your annual check-up with your doctor, dentist (should be twice a year) and optometrist.
- Decide each night what you will wear to work the next day. Make your lunch for the next day the night before.
- When you leave work at the end of the day, leave the problems there. You will be able to work with them tomorrow.

Being responsible

Being responsible is considered an ethical trait. This means that you concern yourself with good and bad, right and wrong, and that you make choices based on your understanding of the rules of good conduct. It means that you think and act in ways that will not harm yourself or another person. Browse through the list of words associated with responsible behaviour and note characteristics you could strengthen.

Being responsible means doing what you said you were going to do, and apologizing if you are unable to meet the commitment. It means returning phone calls and e-mails and taking care of occasional matters, like medical appointments, as well as taking care of matters on a regular basis, like making your bed and cleaning your teeth. By recognizing all the ways you already behave responsibly, you will be able to build and grow so that you can begin to take on more responsibility.

Being adaptable

Flexibility is one of the keys to avoiding stress. Sometimes, no matter how much we plan and how prepared we are to

stay calm in difficult situations, there are competing priorities. Our time can seem completely swallowed up, leaving us no time to deal effectively with any one thing. That's why having good time-management skills is important. But it's also why being adaptable is important. Avoid being strict and inflexible, looking at your daytimer and saying you have no time at the moment, thank you very much. Instead, be adaptable and recognize that at times you have to change your schedule.

Learning continuously

When you start a new job and throughout the year, make a list of people you can contact when questions arise. By building a mentor list or a list of specific people with specific skills, you build your network and become a more powerful and efficient person.

Working safely

Some situations you may encounter as an educational assistant, success coach or behaviour support coach could be intense. It's important for you to show not only respect for the person involved, but also for yourself. To do so involves body language, verbal skills and actions. In highly charged circumstances, our training shows. You can practise these skills in front of a mirror, or with peers, prior to getting out into a job where you may have to use them. All of the skills will be important to you at one time or another; it's putting them all together that takes a little practice.

Be present. Stand tall with your shoulders back. If you hunker over, you'll look uncertain. Take your hands out of your pockets and keep them loosely at your sides. You'll have a more commanding presence this way. Try not to fling your

hands around as you speak or to point at the individual you are talking with.

Recognize your own emotions. No doubt you will be feeling emotional yourself in the face of an individual's behaviour. Be calm. Then recognize the individual's emotions. These are real so there is no sense in ignoring them. Say, "I can see you are upset," or "Could you tell me what happened to make you react this way?"

Be confident. Keep your voice even and modulated in tone. If you have a high pitch or speak quickly, you will show you are nervous.

Usually, catching a situation before it escalates can help ensure a safe environment. However, there will be times that both you and the individual you are working with need a safe place to separately express your emotions. There may be a place in the work environment that is designated a "safe place" where individuals can go to calm down and relax. Rather than being a negative place where individuals go when they are reprimanded, it is a welcoming place where they can go to have some privacy (although the teacher will still be able to see the student). The space will probably have a soft chair and some other items that are reassuring. For example, in elementary classrooms, there may be soft animal toys.

One approach to teach relaxation is labelled STAR, for

Stop

Take a deep breath

And

Relax.

Only one person at a time may go to the safe place.

Dealing with at-risk behaviours

Occasionally individuals may place themselves or others at risk. These are situations where having a school policy in place, and knowing the policy, can help you de-escalate the situation. Here are some proactive steps you can take to ensure you work safely at all times.

- Talk with the supervisor about behaviour support plans for students with behaviours of concern.
- Focus on prevention and developing positive behaviours to replace problem behaviours.
- Have a plan for addressing situations that may include removing the individual or the other individuals from the situation.
- Work with the supervisor and other staff to learn nonviolent crisis intervention.
- Make sure there is a communication plan that defines codes for assistance when using intercoms and cell phones, and a plan for informing parents when something has occurred.
- Make sure there is a team action plan or protocol in place.

Time management

- Use a daytimer. Every time you agree to a meeting or a deadline, write it in your daytimer.
- Put a note in the daytimer at least two days in advance of major deadlines or obligations to remind you to prepare.
- At the end of each day, make a list of what you need to accomplish the next day.
- Prioritize the list.
- Define the hours of the day you will work on each of the items on your list.

- Check items off as you work your way through the list.
- Arrive at the school 15 minutes before you are required to be there.
- Review your schedule.
- Make sure you have all the materials you need—pencils, books, paper, other supplies.
- Check your voice mail and e-mail twice a day—in the morning and at the close of the day.
- Chart any verbal or recorded notes you made throughout the day in the ABC binder you created.

Self-reflection inventory

Working with persons with disabilities can be rewarding. It can also be challenging at times. Effective skills include having sensitivity and a positive perspective toward working with individuals with disabilities. Growth occurs through both personal reflection and constructive feedback.

The following checklist presents some of the basic competencies that are important when working with individuals with disabilities. These are a guideline for reflecting on and developing your own personal inventory of important skills and proficiencies.

Communication Skills

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not yet
I dress and act respectfully while being true to who I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I demonstrate active listening by making and sustaining eye contact, nodding my head, and being aware of what is being said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I listen to what people are communicating both with their words and their nonverbal communication, including tone of voice and body movements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware of what I am communicating, verbally and nonverbally.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am polite, including saying please and thank you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I demonstrate respect and dignity in my communication, including using people-first language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am respectful of individual and family desires and ideas even if I do not agree with them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I listen carefully to directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I clarify my thoughts, plans and activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I participate in meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Interaction Skills

I use my skills to build positive relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find strengths in the people I work with and help individuals and others to recognize those strengths.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I strive to find and build upon new strengths in the individuals with				

whom I work.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Interaction Skills (cont'd)

Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not yet
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I am willing to listen to the suggestions of others and, if necessary, change my plans or ways of viewing a situation.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I recognize my emotional reactions to situations and demonstrate self-control.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I recognize when I am stressed and the situations that stress me, and take actions to reduce this stress.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I strive for balance between my job and other aspects of my life.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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When I make mistakes, I acknowledge them, learn from them and then let them go.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I have a sense of humour.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Organization Skills

I show up to work on time.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I work within time limits.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I keep working even when I run into obstacles.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I bring needed materials and equipment.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I utilize tools effectively, such as electronic calendars and reminders.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I plan effectively for the situation or day.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I recognize my own strengths and areas for growth, and obtain assistance when required.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I actively pursue additional knowledge and training in order to do my job well.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Organization Skills (cont'd)

Always Most of the time Some of the time Not yet

I monitor the effectiveness of what I am doing and, when necessary, take actions to improve it.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I take calculated risks with a goal of improving a person's well-being.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I have personal goals.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I set collaborative goals for the person with whom I work.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I find opportunities to accomplish those goals.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I work through obstacles, keeping the goal in focus and building on my own strengths as well as the strengths of the individual with whom I am working.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I celebrate my success and the successes of others.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Teamwork

I plan effectively with others.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I do my share of the work.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I encourage others.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I seek solutions to problems rather than being critical.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I respectfully share my concerns with my colleague or supervisor.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I ask for feedback.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I request assistance when required.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I share my knowledge and skills with others.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Safety

Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not yet
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I strive to ensure safety for those with whom I work.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I strive to ensure my own personal safety.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I make myself aware of potential hazards and risks, both for physical as well as emotional well-being.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I protect myself and those with whom I work from bullying.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I do not tolerate disrespectful or hurtful comments, teasing or jokes.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I correct others when they have misperceptions that might be hurtful to another person.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I plan for responses to situations that have the potential for risk.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- i *In-Tuition.*
- ii *In-Tuition.*
- iii Modified from the *Mentoring Handbook*.
Section 3.
- iv Alberta Education. 2008. *Supporting
Positive Behaviour in Alberta Schools: An
Intensive Individualized Approach*. p. 25
- v Alberta Education 2008. *Supporting
Positive Behaviour in Alberta Schools: An
Intensive Individualized Approach*. p. 35